

1074

REPORT
OF
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CIRCUMSTANCES
ATTENDING THE LOSS
OF THE
STEAM SHIP "ERIN'S QUEEN,"
OF BELFAST,
BY COLLISION WITH THE STEAM SHIP
"SABRINA," OF CORK;

MADE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE BOARD OF TRADE,
BY COMMANDER ROBERT ROBERTSON, R.N.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.



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FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1855.

CONTENTS.

REPORT -		Page 3
APPENDIX containing—		
Minute directing Investigation -		4
MASURES OF EVIDENCE containing Examination of the following Witnesses :—		
Thomas Ford, Chief Mate of the "Sabrina" -		5
John Leslie, Chief Engineer ditto -		6
Charles Eamstead, A.B. ditto -		6
Nicholas S. Parker, Master ditto -		6
George C. Nicholson, Master of the "Erin's Queen" -		7
Robert Sanderson, A.B., ditto -		8
John Miller, Chief Engineer ditto -		9
Samuel Tovey Siley, Mate ditto -		10
Statement by persons connected with the English and Welsh Ground Light Vessel at the time of the Collision -		10

REPORT.

My Lords,

Board of Trade, 16th January 1855.

In accordance with your Lordships' Minute of the 11th instant, directing an inquiry under the 31st section of the Steam Navigation Act, 14th and 15th Victoria, chapter 79, into the circumstances attending the loss of the steam ship "Erin's Queen," in the Bristol Channel, by collision with the steam ship "Sahrina," on the 6th instant, and appointing me to conduct such investigation :—

I have the honour to report that I proceeded to Bristol accordingly on the 12th, and commenced the investigation at the Local Marine Board on Saturday the 13th, which terminated on the Monday evening following.

That after having weighed deliberately the evidence elicited during the inquiry, and having more particularly considered that part of it which I deem to be most worthy of credence,

I am of opinion that the collision between the "Sahrina" and "Erin's Queen" arose from a proper and vigilant look out not being kept on board the "Sahrina," there being no look-out man on, and the crew below at breakfast.

The chief mate, who was in charge of the deck at the time, admits in evidence that he could see a vessel when half a mile distant ; but states that he never saw the "Erin's Queen" until she was within two lengths of him, and that there was then no time for consideration. At the time of his first seeing the "Erin's Queen" she was crossing him to port, or in a S.E. direction (her helm having been previously ported), and he thought that by putting his helm hard-a-star-board he should pass ahead of her. This was clearly wrong ; he ought to have ported his helm, in accordance with the Act of Parliament, which, had he done, he would in all probability have passed astern and thereby avoided the collision.

I have the honour to be,

My Lords,

Your Lordships' most obedient humble Servant,

R. ROBERTSON, Commander, R.N.

The Right Honourable
the Lords of the Committee of
Privy Council for Trade.

APPENDIX.

MINUTE.

At the Council Chamber, Whitehall, the 11th day of January 1855.

By the Right Honourable the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council
appointed for the Consideration of all Matters relating to Trade and
Foreign Plantations :

Present, The Right Honourable EDWARD CARDWELL, M.P., &c., &c., &c.

My Lords are pleased by virtue of their powers under the Steam Navigation Act, 1851 (14th and 15th Victoria, chapter 79, section 31), to institute an investigation into the circumstances attending the loss of the "Erin's Queen" in the Bristol Channel, by collision with the "Sabrina," on the 6th instant, and for that purpose to appoint Commander Robertson, R.N., to conduct such investigation.

(Signed) EDW. CARDWELL.

11th January 1855.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE,

§c. §c. §c.

Evidence of THOMAS FORD, chief mate of the "Sabrina."

Mr. Thomas Ford.

1. You are the chief mate of the "Sabrina"?—Yes.
2. Have you any certificate?—Yes, of service.
3. Have the goodness to state what occurred after your leaving the river?—We left the river about 8.45 a.m. We then steered down west for the light ship on the English and Welsh grounds. About ten o'clock we observed a vessel on the starboard bow. Put the helm hard-a-starboard, stopped her, and reversed. The "Erin's Queen" put her helm hard-a-port, and came right across our bows. We came in collision and struck her abait the mainmast. We immediately hoisted the boats out, and went to her assistance. She then ran on shore on the S.W. patch. We went to her assistance, and took to the ground alongside her, and remained alongside her until next flood. Finding we could render no assistance, we came back to Bristol.
4. What was the state of the weather at the time?—It was thick and hazy.
5. What distance could you see a vessel approaching?—We could see a vessel half a mile, and the direction she was coming in.
6. At the time you observed the "Erin's Queen" how much was she on the starboard bow?—About three points.
7. How far off was she at the time?—About two ships' lengths off.
8. Had you not seen her before this?—No.
9. Was it your watch at the time?—Yes.
10. You before stated you could see a vessel half a mile distant. How do you account, then, for not having seen her before?—Because she was buried in her own smoke.
11. Where were you at the time?—On the bridge.
12. Where was the captain at that time?—On the quarter deck.
13. Had you any man on the look-out?—We had not; I was looking out myself.
14. What course were you steering at this time?—West.
15. What course did you suppose the "Erin's Queen" to have been steering when you first saw her?—About south-east.
16. Then at that time was she steering across your bows?—Yes.
17. Then why did you put the helm hard-a-starboard?—We put our helm hard-a-starboard, thinking to go ahead of her.
18. Had you ported your helm, would you not have gone astern of her?—No; I think not.
19. Why do you think not?—Because she was so close.
20. When you ordered the helm to be put "hard-a-starboard," did you give any orders respecting the engines?—Yes; I ordered the engines to be stopped and reversed, which was immediately done.
21. What time elapsed between your putting your helm hard-a-starboard and the collision?—About a minute.
22. Did you observe whether the "Erin's Queen" ported or starboarded her helm?—I observed her port her helm before I starboarded mine.
23. You surely then ought to have ported your helm?—There was not time for anything between my seeing the vessel and the collision for any consideration; in fact, between the time of my seeing the vessel and the collision scarcely a minute had elapsed.
24. Was it your smoke or the smoke of the "Erin's Queen" prevented your seeing the direction she was coming in?—The smoke of the "Erin's Queen."
25. Were you going at full speed?—Yes.
26. On which shore were you, the port or starboard?—The starboard shore, rather towards the south-west patch.
27. What is the distance between the lightvessel and the south-west patch?—About one mile.
28. You stated before,—you saw her port her helm and then starboarded yours; is that the case?—I don't know what she did, but I starboarded mine; but I saw, immediately after I starboarded mine, that hers was a port.
29. I believe there was an engineer hurt on board the "Erin's Queen;" was every attention and assistance rendered him by the captain and crew of the "Sabrina"?—Yes; every attention. We brought him up to Bristol, and sent him to the Infirmary.
30. Is there anything else you can state?—No, I think not.

(Signed) THOMAS FORD.

Mr. John Leslie.

Evidence of JOHN LESLIE, chief engineer of the "Sabrina."

31. Were you in charge of the machinery on the day of the collision?—Yes, I was.
 32. Will you state what orders were given you (if any) previously to the collision taking place?—The only orders I received was to stop and reverse her, which was immediately done, having been prepared to do so, through hearing the mate cry out sharply, "Starboard, hard-a-starboard."
 33. How long was it between the time of the engines being stopped and the collision taking place?—Not half a minute.
 34. Had the engines made any revolutions astern previous to the collision?—To the best of my belief they had not.
 35. Was the order given to stop the engines at the same time that you heard the order "Hard-a-starboard"?—About the same time.
 36. Have you anything to add to this?—No.

(Signed) JOHN LESLIE.

Charles Eamstead.

Evidence of CHARLES EAMSTEAD, able seaman of the "Sabrina."

37. Were you at the helm at the time of the collision with the "Erin's Queen"?—Yes, I was.
 38. What orders were given you previous to the collision?—To put the helm hard-a-starboard.
 39. Who gave you those orders?—The mate.
 40. Where was he at the time?—On the bridge looking out.
 41. Had you seen anything of the "Erin's Queen" previously to the orders being given to "hard-a-starboard" the helm?—No.
 42. Which side of the wheel were you standing?—The port side.
 43. From your position could you see a vessel two points on the starboard bow?—Yes.
 44. What was the state of the weather?—It was very thick.
 45. How far could you see a vessel ahead or on the port bow?—From half a mile to a mile.
 46. How long was it between the time of the helm being put hard-a-starboard and the collision?—About one minute as near as I can judge.
 47. Did you see anything of the vessel previous to your striking her?—No; I did not.
 48. How were you steering previous to the collision; and how was the ship's head at the time of the collision?—Just previous to the collision west, and at the time of the collision south-west by west.
 49. What speed do you suppose the vessel to have been going at the time the helm was put hard-a-starboard?—About eleven or twelve knots.
 50. Was the "Erin's Queen" at the time of collision, under sail?—Yes, she was.
 51. What was done at the time of the collision?—The boats were got out to render assistance.
 52. Were the boats at the davits and ready for use at the time of the collision?—One boat was landed on the deck, hanging in the tackles; the other boat was suspended in the tackles inside the rail.
 53. Are you in the habit of carrying your boats in that way?—Sometimes.
 54. How was the tide at this time?—I do not know.
 55. Can you give me any further information?—No.

(Signed) CHARLES EAMSTEAD.

Captain Parker.

Evidence of NICHOLAS S. PARKER, captain of the "Sabrina."

56. Were you captain of the "Sabrina" at the time of the collision?—Yes.
 57. Have you any certificate of competency or service?—Yes, of service.
 58. Have you commanded a steamer many years?—Yes, more than 30 years between Bristol and Cork.
 59. Have the goodness to state what occurred from the time of leaving the river up to the time of the collision.—We proceeded in our usual course down Channel west; the weather was thick to the northward of our course, but rather clearer to the southward; the wind light from the north-west, when nearly abreast of the English and Welsh ground, going full speed, the lights of the half a mile to the south-west. Walking the quarter deck, the first mate having charge of the watch at the time, and who was walking the bridge, all at once he sung out "Starboard, hard-a-starboard." I immediately ran aft to the man at the wheel to assist him to heave it over. As soon as the mate called out hard-a-starboard, he ordered the engine to be stopped and reversed, which was immediately done. At this moment the collision took place. The boats were hoisted out, and every assistance rendered. I sent one boat to the assistance of the "Erin's Queen," and seeing a man in the water, I steamed towards him, having a boat ready to lower down to pick

him up, when I observed a boat belonging to the lightvessel pick up the man. I took him on board and paid every attention to him, taking him up to Bristol and then to the Infirmary.

Captain Parker.

60. You have stated the weather was very thick to the northward and clearer to the southward; how far could you see a vessel approaching on the starboard bow?—At the outside a quarter of a mile.

61. Did you see anything of the steamer "Erin's Queen" previous to the helm being ordered hard-a-starboard?—No, I did not; but I saw smoke about four points on the starboard bow, just before the mate sung out "Hard-a-starboard."

62. Was any man on the look-out besides the mate?—No, the crew had gone down to their breakfast.

63. Are you acquainted with the rules laid down by Act of Parliament for vessels approaching in opposite directions?—Yes.

64. Then have the goodness to state what they are?—That in case of vessels approaching each other in opposite directions, nearly ahead, that we should both port our helms, but not when she is broad on the bow.

65. It has been stated by a witness that you were in the habit of carrying your boats inboard suspended by the tackles?—Yes.

66. Is it the custom to have a look-out placed to look out for vessels in the steamer you command?—Yes.

67. But in this instance there was none?—No, there was none.

68. To what do you attribute the "Erin's Queen" not being seen before?—The thickness of the weather.

69. Are you not in the habit of slowing the engines in thick weather?—In extreme thick weather we are.

70. What do you call extreme thick weather?—When I cannot see a ship more than four times her length ahead.

71. You could not see, on the day in question, more than four ships' lengths on the starboard bow?—I could not see more, but I could see a mile ahead, and on the port bow also.

72. Had your helm been ported on the day in question on first seeing the "Erin's Queen," would the collision, in your opinion, have been avoided?—No; she was too close when first seen.

73. The weather being thick, and from what you have just stated, would it not have been more prudent to have reduced the speed of the ship?—Under the circumstances, yes.

74. What was the state of the tide at this time?—Slack water.

75. Can you give me any further information?—No; but I wish it to be understood that, being able to see a mile ahead and a mile on the port bow, I did not think it necessary to slow the engines.

76. What is the distance between the light ship and the south-west patch?—About a mile; I was in midchannel, between the light vessel and the south-west patch.

77. Are you in the habit of attending to that regulation, viz. to keep the starboard abreast?—Yes.

(Signed) NICHOLAS S. PARKER.

Evidence of GEORGE C. NICHOLSON, captain of the "Erin's Queen."

Captain Nicholson.

78. Are you the captain of the "Erin's Queen"?—Yes.

79. Have you any certificate from the Board of Trade?—Yes, of competency.

80. What is the "Erin's Queen"?—A screw steamer, belonging to the Belfast Steam Ship Company, 291 tons, 60 horse-power.

81. Have you been long in command of a steamer?—About five months, and previous to that I was about two years mate of a steamer.

82. Have the goodness to state what occurred up to the time of the collision?—I was proceeding under steam and sail for Bristol. When nearly abreast of the lightship on the English and Welsh ground, the weather at the time being misty, the wind from the westward, when my engineer drew my attention to a steamer ahead. On looking, I saw a steamer about one mile distant. I saw both bows, and what I could see of the mast and funnel were in one. She was coming on and on to me. I ordered the helm "Steady port," which was done; I at the same time blew the signal whistle. On looking out again, I saw the "Sahrina" had starboarded her helm. I then ordered the helm "Hard-a-port." The helm was put hard-a-port; but the men at the wheel drew my attention to the lightvessel being so close, to which I said never mind, calculating, as being ebb tide, I would clear the lightvessel with the port helm. I blew the whistle again, and seeing the vessel coming towards our midships, I left the whistle blowing, and ran aft, at the same time the steamer running into us abaft the port main rigging, and apparently cutting us in two. Her out-water cut right through to the starboard hullworks. I called out to my mate and crew to jump on board the "Sahrina." When I saw all the crew on the "Sahrina," I followed. I then saw the second engineer struggling in the water. I got hold of a rope, and threw it to him. He got hold of it, and I endeavoured to haul him up the Sahrina's bows. He

Captain Nicholson. could not hold on. The "Sabrina" then backed astern, to clear the "Erin's Queen." I then ran aft to the port quarter of the "Sabrina," and jumped in a boat, for the purpose of saving the man; but by the time the boat was unhooked from the davits, and clear of the ship, I saw the lightship's boat pick up the man. Seeing the "Erin's Queen" still afloat, I went back to her, and was taken in tow by the "Usk" back to the "Erin's Queen." When I got on board her, the engines had stopped, and she had progressed under canvas towards the north shore. Finding her sinking, I put her on the south-west patch. On her approaching the south-west patch, supposing her to be sinking, I ordered the crew in the boat, and remained alongside. When she touched the ground the ebb tide swung her to the westward. The "Sabrina" came afterwards and grounded on the patch, and gave me all the assistance in her power, and her carpenter shored the main bulk head.

83. You can positively swear that the steamer when seen by you was right a-head?—Yes; and about a mile distant.

84. How far off could you see a vessel and be able to make out the direction she was steering at the time?—A mile or more.

85. You stated that you then ported your helm?—I ported my helm in compliance with the Act of Parliament.

86. After having ported your helm, did you observe the "Sabrina" do anything?—I noticed from the direction of the "Sabrina's" head that she had starboarded her helm, I then ordered the helm hard-a-port.

87. How far off was she when you put your helm hard-a-port?—About half a mile.

88. Did you give any orders respecting the engines?—No, I went on at full speed with the helm hard-a-port to run out of her way.

89. What time expired between your first putting your helm a-port and the collision?—About five minutes.

90. How near were you to the lightvessel when the collision took place?—Within 200 or 300 yards.

91. What course had you been steering previous to your porting your helm?—About east.

92. Were you nearer to the lightship or the south-west patch previous to your porting your helm?—To the lightship, rather to the starboard side of the midchannel.

93. Were you on the bridge at the time you first ported your helm?—No; I was not.

94. Did you go on the bridge any time between first seeing the steamer approaching and the collision?—No; I could not stand on the bridge for the smoke until the helm was ported.

95. Then you never lost sight of the steamer from the time when you ported your helm up to the collision?—No.

96. You state you were on the port side of the quarter deck; had the "Sabrina" been two or three points on the starboard bow, could you have seen her?—No, I could not; the gaff foremast and head sails being set, I could not have seen her without crossing over to the other side.

97. Had the "Sabrina" ported her helm when you put your helm hard-a-port, would she have cleared you?—Undoubtedly she would.

98. Had you starboarded your helm when you saw the "Sabrina" had starboarded hers, would you have cleared her?—I doubt that.

99. Were your boats at the davits ready for lowering at the time of the collision?—One boat was on the deck suspended at the davits, the other was over the main hatchway on checks.

100. Is there any further information you can give me?—Had the "Sabrina" only kept the course she was steering on my porting my helm she would have cleared.

101. How was the "Erin's Queen's" head at the time of the collision?—From S.E. to S.S.E.

102. Is the channel you were coming up the one usually used?—Yes, it is.

(Signed) GEORGE COLVILLE NICHOLSON.

Robert Sanderson.

Evidence of ROBERT SANDERSON, able seaman of the "Erin's Queen."

103. Were you at the wheel of the "Erin's Queen" at the time of the collision?—Yes, I was.

104. State what you know of this collision?—We were coming up the channel towards Bristol, steering about east or east-half-south, when I heard the chief engineer call the captain's attention to a vessel being right ahead; the captain was then walking the starboard side of the quarter deck; he went over to the port side of the quarter deck, and told me to port the helm, which I did, and the whistle was blown; soon after he ordered the helm to be put hard-a-port. I said "Then we shall be into the lightship." He said, "No matter, hard-a-port." Shortly after that the steamer struck us.

105. Whom was the chief engineer standing at the time he reported the vessel to the captain?—On the port side.

106. Did you see the vessel?—No; not until the helm had first been ported.

107. Had the "Erin's Queen's" course much altered when you saw the vessel?—Not more than a point.

108. When you first saw the "Sabrina," what was her position?—About half a point or a point on the port bow.
109. What distance was she off then?—About a mile.
110. The weather being thick, how far could you see a vessel that day?—I saw the lightvessel, I think, from three to four miles off.
111. Where was the captain, from the time of his first ordering the helm to be ported up to the time of the collision?—I think on the port side of the quarter deck.
112. What speed were you going at?—About seven knots.
113. Was there any man looking out?—I don't know, but the mate and a man were forward.
114. Had the "Sabrina" kept the course she was steering when you first saw her, would she have cleared you, considering you had ported your helm?—I cannot say, but if she had ported her helm she certainly would.
115. Is it the custom in the "Erin's Queen" to have a man on the look-out?—Yes, it is.
116. Did you, or did you hear any one else, make a remark to the captain that if he ported the helm the "Sabrina" would run him down?—No, I did not.
117. Can you state anything else?—No.

(Signed) ROBERT SANDERSON.

Robert Sanderson.

Evidence of JOHN MILLER, Chief Engineer of the "Erin's Queen."

Mr. John Miller.

118. Were you engineer of the "Erin's Queen" at the time of the collision?—Yes.
119. State what you know respecting the collision?—Coming up the Channel on Saturday morning, the 6th January, I, being on deck and on the port side, saw a steamer about a mile off; she was as near ahead of us as possible, if anything on our port bow. I went aft to the captain, who was just crossing from the starboard to the port side. I asked him if he had seen that vessel. There were two or three vessels on our port side. He looked towards them, and I told him it was not them, but one ahead. Then he said, "I see her," and gave orders to the man at the wheel to port the helm, and then said, "Steady." A little after that he said, "Hard-a-port," and in about a minute the "Sabrina" ran into us, nearly stem on. I was standing on the port side then, just abaft where the collision took place. The engines of the "Sabrina" were then going ahead. I ran aft, and went with the captain to the starboard side. I then ran to the bow of the "Sabrina," whose stem was striking into the "Erin's Queen." I held on to the "Sabrina's" bows by one hand, and saw the second engineer lying on his head immediately underneath, and close to the outwater of the "Sabrina;" I tried to reach down to him with one hand, but could not reach so far. The captain came to the spot and tried to reach him also. The captain then asked some one on board the "Sabrina" for a rope, which was thrown to him. He handed the end down to the second engineer in his bed; he got hold of it with both his hands. That was all I saw with regard to him until I got on board the "Sabrina;" I then saw him in the water, and ran on the bridge to the captain of the "Sabrina," and told him to turn ahead and save the man, the engine being then stopped. The captain made no reply, and did not steam up to him. I came down off the bridge and went forward, seeing the man still in the water. I went to the captain again and told him to steam ahead; he appeared agitated. I then saw the boat from the lightship cross the bows of the "Sabrina," and pick up the man. The boat brought him alongside the "Sabrina;" he was assisted out of the boat and taken down to the cabin, when every attention was shown to him by the captain of the "Sabrina." He was taken up in her to Bristol, and to the Infirmary.
120. Are you quite sure the steamer, when you first saw her and called the attention of the captain to her, was right ahead?—Yes, right ahead; I never saw her on the starboard bow. She was about a mile distant.
121. On your first seeing the "Sabrina" had you any apprehension from the way she was then steering that she would run into you?—No, I had not.
122. When you heard the captain order the helm hard-a-port did you think she would run into you?—Yes, because I saw the "Sabrina's" bow turning towards our port side, and felt sure she would strike us.
123. At the time of the collision were the engines of the "Sabrina" stopped?—I cannot positively say if they were when she struck us.
124. Did you make any further remark to the captain when the collision appeared inevitable?—Yes, I said she would be into us; he then went to the whistle and opened it, and sung out "Hard-a-port." The man at the helm answered "It is hard-a-port."
125. How far could you see a vessel that day?—I could see the land on the starboard shore, about two miles distant, and could see a mile distinctly all round.
126. Were your engines going full speed at the time of the collision?—Yes, they were.
127. How near were you to the lightvessel when the collision took place?—Within 200 yards.
128. You have stated there were two or three vessels on the port side?—I saw a steamboat and a sailing vessel about a mile distant.
129. In what direction was the steamer going?—She was coming down channel.

Mr. John Miller.

130. Did you see her after the collision?—Yes, and she went towards the “Erin’s Queen,” but I do not know what steamer she was.

131. Is there anything more you can state?—No.

(Signed) JOHN MILLER.

Question requested to be put by Mr. Parker, Solicitor to the Cork Steam Shipping Company.

132. Can you say that at the time you heard the captain order the helm apace, the vessel then, according to your evidence, being a mile off, if he had starboarded the helm, would there have been space to go clear of the “Sabrina”?—I cannot say.

Mr. S. T. Siley.

Evidence of SAMUEL TOVEY SILEY, Mate of “Erin’s Queen.”

133. Were you mate on board the “Erin’s Queen,” at the time of the collision with the “Sabrina”?—Yes.

134. Have you any certificate of service or competency from the Board of Trade?—No.

135. State what you know of the collision?—I was in the watercloset and did not see anything until she was within six feet of us.

136. What was the state of the weather at the time?—It was a light breeze, and sufficiently clear to see the way. A vessel was standing a mile and a half off.

137. Is it the custom in your vessel to have a look-out man on?—Yes, in thick weather, or at night.

138. Was there any look-out man on this occasion?—No, there was not; the captain himself was in charge of the deck.

139. What took place after the collision?—We all got on board the “Sabrina,” except the second engineer, who was picked up by the boat from the lightship and brought on board the “Sabrina.” I then went back to the “Erin’s Queen,” in the “Sabrina’s” boat, with the Captain of the “Erin’s Queen.”

140. What sail was the “Erin’s Queen” under at the time of the collision?—Under all plain sail but the square sail, and the head yards were nearly square, the wind being aft.

(Signed) SAMUEL TOVEY SILEY.

Question requested to be put by Mr. Parker.

141. How was the ship’s head at the time of the collision?—I know nothing about it.

(Copy.)

Saturday, January 6, 1855.

At nine A.M., gentle breeze, west north-west, overcast and misty. At 9.10 A.M. high water, 10½ fathoms. At 9.35 A.M. saw the screw steamer “Erin’s Queen” coming up channel under sail and steam, and “Sabrina” of Cork coming down under steam. The “Erin’s Queen” sounded whistle and ported her helm, so as to jibe in a few minutes; she sounded her whistle and hove her helm hard-a-port, altering her course three or four points, and sounded her whistle again, “Sabrina” not having apparently seen her. I heard the order from “Sabrina” to stop her and starboard twice or thrice, also port once, but too late to prevent the collision. The “Sabrina” ran into “Erin’s Queen” on port side, abash the mainmast, cutting her nearly in two. When the vessel cleared I observed a man floating on the water. I had the lightvessel’s boat lowered, and sent her to pick the man up; took him alongside the “Sabrina,” when they would hardly give the boat a rope or assist to haul the man on board, he being severely injured, and unable to assist himself. They ran both steamers on shore, on the south-west patch, just saving the “Erin’s Queen” from sinking in deep water.

(Signed) JAMES BOXHALL,

In charge of English and Welsh grounds lightvessel, “Benjamin John,” Waterma at the time of the collision.

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